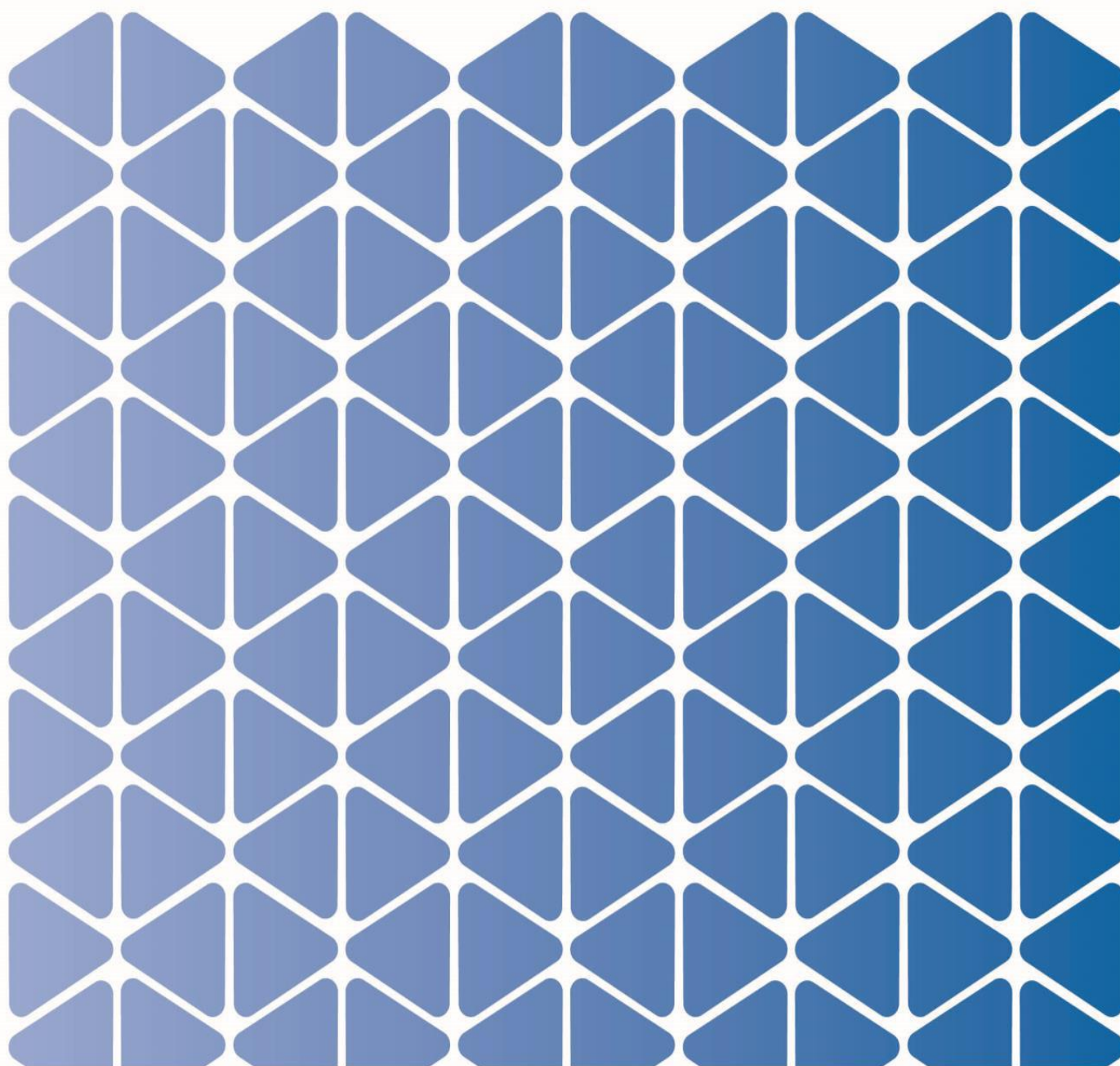


PATIENT INFORMATION

PALLIATIVE RADIOOTHERAPY





Worcestershire Oncology Centre

Improving cancer services in Worcestershire

Introduction

Palliative radiotherapy is a form of radiotherapy used to manage symptoms caused by cancer rather than aiming to cure the disease. It targets specific areas helping to shrink the tumour, slow its growth, and alleviate symptoms such as pain, bleeding, obstruction and difficulty breathing. Therefore, the purpose of palliative radiotherapy is to make the patient more comfortable and ultimately, improve their quality of life. It can also help with other symptoms related to the tumour's effect on surrounding tissues or organs.

Before starting the treatment, your doctor will discuss the potential benefits, expected outcomes, and possible side effects of palliative radiotherapy. This conversation ensures that you fully understand the treatment plan and are able to give informed consent before proceeding.

Side effects of treatment

Although you may only receive a few sessions of palliative radiotherapy, side effects can still occur. These are typically short-term and usually resolve within 1-4 weeks after the treatment has finished. The specific side effects you experience depend on the area of the body being treated.

Some common side effects may include:

- **Tiredness and fatigue** - Feeling unusually tired or exhausted, which can last for several weeks after treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids and gentle exercise when you feel able will help to reduce this.
- **Skin Changes:** Redness, dryness, or irritation in the skin at the treatment site, similar to sunburn.
- **Pain or Discomfort:** Temporary increase in pain or discomfort in the area being treated. This can start shortly after treatment, to within a few weeks of finishing treatment. You may need to temporarily increase any pain medication you are on.
- **Hair Loss:** You may lose your hair in the area being treated eg. scalp. The hair loss will be slow and gradual and may not occur until after your treatment

has finished. The hair will usually grow back a few months after the treatment has finished, but it may be thinner or have a different texture.

- **Headache** – You may notice you have more headaches than usual, especially if you are having treatment to your brain or head and neck area. You may need to take pain relief to help with this. If the headaches are persistent and you are concerned, then please speak to your doctor or nurse.
- **Cough** – Radiotherapy to the chest area can cause you to develop a cough. This may be a dry cough or you may cough up blood or phlegm. This usually settles in the weeks after treatment is complete. If you are experiencing breathlessness this may initially worsen before settling down.
- **Difficulty in swallowing/indigestion** – This may occur if you are having your head and neck or chest area treated. You may need to temporarily switch to softer foods.
- **Nausea/sickness** – you may feel sick if you are receiving treatment to your abdominal area. Your doctor may prescribe anti-sickness tablets to help with this. Drinking plenty of fluids can also help.
- **Changes in bowel habits** – Radiotherapy to the pelvis area can cause loose stools and/or diarrhoea. Switching to a lower fibre diet may help. Your radiographers will be able to advise you with this.
- **Changes in urinary function** – following treatment to your pelvis area, you may find that you need to pass urine more frequently. This may be accompanied by some blood or debris. If you find you are unable to pass urine you should contact your GP immediately for further advice.

Your doctor will tell you about any other relevant side effects when discussing the treatment with you.

Any symptoms that you may have may worsen before they start to get better e.g. Headaches may worsen or pain may flare and increase. Please speak to one of the team and they can advise you on how to manage this.

Treatment Planning and treatment

To plan your radiotherapy treatment, you will usually need to have a CT radiotherapy planning scan. The purpose of this scan is to plan your radiotherapy treatment and is not used to look for tumour growth and spread or other medical conditions.

After the CT scan, you will be given an appointment to start your radiotherapy treatment.

On the day of your treatment, the radiographers will chat to you to explain the treatment process and give you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

You will then be taken into the treatment room and asked to lie on the treatment couch. You will be positioned on the treatment couch and the radiographers will leave the room to switch the treatment machine on. It is important that you keep

as still as possible during the treatment and continue to breath normally. You may find it useful to take pain relief prior to each treatment session. You do not feel anything during the treatment.

The radiotherapy treatment will not make you radioactive and you are safe to be around pregnant people.

Further info

If you are concerned about the late effects of radiotherapy treatment, or would like more information, please speak to your consultant, the Acute Oncology Service 01905 760158 or the Macmillan specialist radiographers on 01905 761420.

You may also contact your GP or your Clinical Nurse Specialist.

If your symptoms or condition worsens, or if you are concerned about anything, please call your GP, 111, or 999.

Patient Experience

We know that being admitted to hospital can be a difficult and unsettling time for you and your loved ones. If you have any questions or concerns, please do speak with a member of staff on the ward or in the relevant department who will do their best to answer your questions and reassure you.

Feedback

Feedback is really important and useful to us – it can tell us where we are working well and where improvements can be made. There are lots of ways you can share your experience with us including completing our Friends and Family Test – cards are available and can be posted on all wards, departments and clinics at our hospitals. We value your comments and feedback and thank you for taking the time to share this with us.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or questions about your care, we advise you to talk with the nurse in charge or the department manager in the first instance as they are best placed to answer any questions or resolve concerns quickly. If the relevant member of staff is unable to help resolve your concern, you can contact the PALS Team. We offer informal help, advice or support about any aspect of hospital services & experiences.

Our PALS team will liaise with the various departments in our hospitals on your behalf, if you feel unable to do so, to resolve your problems and where appropriate refer to outside help.

If you are still unhappy you can contact the Complaints Department, who can investigate your concerns. You can make a complaint orally, electronically or in writing and we can advise and guide you through the complaints procedure.

How to contact PALS:

Telephone Patient Services: 0300 123 1732 or via email at: wah-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Opening times:

The PALS telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 4.00pm. Please be aware that you may need to leave a voicemail message, but we aim to return your call within one working day.

If you are unable to understand this leaflet, please communicate with a member of staff.